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STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR URGES HIGH-RISK INDIVIDUALS TO GET TESTED FOR HIV *National HIV Testing Day is June 27*

SACRAMENTO – Urging Californians not to be complacent in the fight against HIV/AIDS, State Health Director Sandra Shewry today encouraged high-risk individuals to observe this year's National HIV Testing Day on June 27 by getting tested. Anonymous and confidential HIV testing sites are available throughout California.

"Prevention is our strongest tool in the battle against HIV/AIDS," Shewry said. "It is essential that high-risk individuals learn the facts about HIV, get tested and become actively involved in fighting this devastating disease."

The theme of this year's National HIV Testing Day, *I Got Tested for HIV to Take Control of My Health and My Life. What's Your Reason?* encourages high-risk people to seek voluntary HIV testing and counseling. For people who test positive for HIV, learning their HIV test results can help them take steps to protect their own health and that of their partners. For those who test negative, learning their HIV status can help them get the information and support they need to stay uninfected.

High-risk individuals include men who have sex with men, injection drug users, individuals who have unprotected sex with multiple sex partners, sex or needle-sharing partners of an at-risk individual and those who have participated in a high-risk behavior in the past and are unaware of their HIV status.

The number of illnesses and deaths associated with HIV and AIDS continues to rise, and the statistics associated with HIV and AIDS are alarming:

- From 1981 through April 30, 2005, 136,994 AIDS cases were reported in California and 79,777 individuals died from the disease.
- From July 1, 2002, when HIV reporting by non-name code, which enables individuals to learn their HIV status without being identified, became effective in California, through April 30, 2005, 37,166 HIV cases were reported to the California Department of Health Services' (CDHS) Office of AIDS. The ethnic breakdown for reported HIV cases is: White, 49 percent; Latino, 25 percent; African-American, 20 percent; Asian/Pacific Islander/Hawaiian, 3 percent; American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1 percent; and unknown, 2 percent.

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- The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as 280,000 individuals in the United States are infected with HIV and are unaware of their status.
- The African-American population in the United States continues to be disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. In 2003, African-Americans represented only 12 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for nearly 40 percent of total AIDS cases and more than half of the 40,000 newly diagnosed HIV cases estimated to occur. In 2002, HIV/AIDS was the No. 1 killer among African-American men ages 35-44 and women ages 25-34.
- In California, African-Americans represent 7 percent of the population, yet account for 18 percent, or 24,135, of the total AIDS cases and 20 percent, or 7,383, of HIV cases reported as of April 30. Latinos represent 32 percent of the population and account for 22 percent, or 30,477, reported AIDS cases and 25 percent, or 9,465, of HIV cases.

HIV testing is available using standard blood tests, oral fluid testing or new technology known as the OraQuick Advance Rapid HIV-1 and 2 Antibody Test. The new test is available at low or no cost in approximately 30 of California's 58 counties, with plans in place for statewide availability by the end of the year. The simple procedure provides HIV results within a single testing and counseling visit using oral samples or blood drawn from a finger prick.

"The rapid HIV test enables health care providers to immediately help individuals make decisions that reduce the chance of transmitting HIV to others," Shewry said. "The key to preventing the spread of HIV is helping more individuals become aware of their status."

For more information about AIDS or HIV testing, contact the California AIDS Hotline at 1-800-367-AIDS (2437). For more information about the programs and services of CDHS' Office of AIDS and for California-specific HIV and AIDS case data, log on to www.dhs.ca.gov/AIDS.

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For more information about National HIV Testing Day, log on to the National Association for People with AIDS website: <http://www.napwa.org/>